

NME WHAT'S ON PULL-OUT

A CASE OF nostalgia for Wishbone Ash on Tuesday when they played the superb modern Civic Hall in Dunstable — for Dunstable was the first place they unleashed their by-now-unmistakable sound on any audience, some three years ago.

On that first occasion they were paid a mere £5. I don't know how much they got this time round, but whatever it was, the promoter got his money's worth.

Nothing is worse than a band who strives for perfection, finds it and then becomes boring. Ash however, are near to their own perfection — but have sustained excitement which buzzes out to the crowd and is reflected back again.

All the familiar numbers were there: "Time Was," "Jailbait," "The Pilgrim"; none of them lost anything.

For now Wishbone are supreme, flashing their way through each number, Martin Turner looking decidedly arrogant (and almost evil), Ted Turner and Andy Powell all but making their guitars talk; Steve Upton, sweat pouring from everywhere.

And if the audience at times did appear to be unmotivated it wasn't because the set lacked ability or sparkle. It was exhausting just watching them.

The highlights for me were the two excellent "Argus" tracks: "The Warrior" and "Throw Down The Sword," sensitively performed with precision, skill and self confidence. For the one quality Wishbone have gained since

their American tours is confidence. So what if they do sing an occasional bum note? It didn't matter. The atmosphere was there alongside the cockiness, mainly with drummer Steve Upton who did his "cabaret" stint, prior to "The Pilgrim."

Winner number with the audience was, of course, the all-time favourite "Phoenix" — their closing number. Perhaps it's because the number is a real test of their musicianship that it is shown such reverence and respect whenever it is played.

Anyway the band returned for two encores (they could hardly have skulked off to the dressing-rooms with the whole place giving them a standing ovation). And, as well as the single "No Easy Road," we were treated to the sight of a king-size Father Christmas throwing out dozens of Wishbone T-shirts from his sack. Good on ya Wishbone. Arrogance, pomposity and cockiness suit you well.

JULIE WEBB

'LORD OF THE DANCE'

WITH A CAST of thousands, Karl Dallas's Christmas production, "Lord Of The Dance", was likely to win. But it succeeded beyond the wil-

dest dreams of those who mounted the show at Southwark Cathedral.

The cathedral was bursting at the aisles, bodies all over the nave and crammed around the ancient pillars, and they went wild in their reception for the calendar of carols — an attempt to marry Christian and pagan traditions of dance and song. The show drew on talents of leading folk and folk fringe performers, traditional dancers (Chingford Morris Men), and actors who put splendid life into legendary stories. It was, in fact, a joyous celebration of the non-commercial Christmas, based on the Apocryphal Gospels, ancient lore and hand-downs, and songs that are less familiar (and on the whole better) than the standard carols, and unquestionably superior to those songs of the "White Christmas" and "Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer" school.

Impressive dramatic high-spots included a tableau presentation (with narrator Tony Rose) of the legend of "The Fourth Nail Of The Crucifixion". The actors excelled also in a depiction of the palm tree that bowed at Jesus' command to the Virgin Mary, so that she might pick its fruits... immediately followed by Martin Carthy singing "The Cherry Tree Carol", another version of the legend.

One of the best features of the evening was the use of uncommon combinations of talents — such as Carthy and the Watsons, and even, at one glorious point in the proceedings, the Watsons and the Young Tradition, on "Hal And Tow". And there

was a magnificent rendering by EVERYONE — Watsons, YT, Carthy, Broken Consort, Carole Pegg, Jenny Beeching and many more, with assorted ancient and modern instruments, who made "Tomorrow Will Be Our Dancing Day" sound (appropriately enough considering the venue) like an anthem.

Impossible to credit every lovely moment of this superb evening, but special mentions to the Copper Family (they sound fantastic in a cathedral), Ian Grant (ex-BBC) for the immaculate sound, stage director Len Alsop, and the unnamed lighting technicians.

The welcome (if temporary) reappearance of the Young Tradition was greeted with the rapture it deserved, and the show ended with mass dancing (even a "Knees Up Mother Brown"), and a fire-eater who blew immense and brilliant flames into the dark reaches of the cathedral roof.

ERIC WINTER

NME FREE NIGHT/MARQUEE

WELL, IT WAS a party alright. Gnidrolog kicked off the evening with a set of high contrast music with changes in tempo, volume and mood. "The Song" brought in a humorous touch when Colin Goldring came on sporting a school cap, and proceeded to sing a jolly little song about shooting people with the guns he got for Christmas. My attention was grabbed by the bass-playing of Peter Mars Cowling — which could best

be described as "active". An amiable giant

nightie was dancing about as they played (over to the man-in-the-street who says: "The most promising band in existence today"). I'll reserve judgement until I've seen Gnidrolog some more.

By this time the club was full of atmosphere: the pretty coloured lights reolving, the festoons shimmering and the air thick with smoke and haze. Last — minute unplanned surprise was the jam session which Mo Bacon chooses to call "The Brown Out Boogie Band".

The line up was basically Keith Gemmell of Sammy on sax, Pete Simmons (also

Sammy) on bass, Mo Bacon (Morgan) on drums, Tim Staffell (Morgan) on guitar and vocals, ditto Mr. Shifter.

Jams are rarely very enjoyable for the audience and this one was no exception. There were the occasional bright moments but it was loud and, naturally, not particularly delicate. Mo Bacon emerged as the star turn, not only because his drumming was very positive but also because he dictated tempo changes whenever he felt like it. Maybe the jam was spread a bit too thick. PAUL WEIR

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FRONT ROW REVIEWS

Scotland

ONE OF THE memorable aspects of the best-forgotten shambles at the Grange-mouth Popfest last autumn was the Average White Band. Not just because they are a Scottish product. They had the job of softening up the audience just after midday and their spirited music made it work.

And to prove that I'm not being simply patriotic, here's word of the band's exploits on their recently completed American trip. Leader Alan Gorrie from Perth explains: "We spent close on a couple of months working on the latest solo album by Bonnie Bramlett. We provided all of the backing music for her — and reaction to the album,

due out early in the New Year, will be vital to the band."

Meanwhile the Average White Band has been building its image back home, sharing the bill on the Wishbone Ash tour. Gorrie, a prolific writer, supplies most of the material for Roger Ball (Broughty Ferry), Owen McIntyre and Hamish Stuart (both Glasgow) and Malcolm Duncan (Dundee). The band feels that 1973 must be their make-or-break year. If they have doubts, Miss Bramlett hasn't.

SCOTS FANS were appreciative of Hackensack's work when the four-piece heavy rock unit from London played Green's Play House, Glasgow, and the Empire, Edin-

burgh, last spring in support of Mott the Hoople. But there was nobody hanging on to the band's coat-tails when they left, imploring them to hurry back.

Which is all rather disconcerting for Hackensack's manager Colin Huntley who has taken the matter up with the Scotland column. "We had a ball on both those Scots gigs and our music enjoyed a fantastic response. But we've never back your side of the Border. Nearest we get on our gigs up north is Newcastle and Carlisle when, really, we could hop to Glasgow or Edinburgh in no time."

Hackensack's lead singer Nicky Moore adds: "We've since gone from strength to strength. We did part of Free's last tour and though we're finding the work we'd like to fit in some one-nighters in Scotland between now and the spring. We want the

heavy Jocks to ring Colin at 01-303 7134 or else we'll have the kilt off them."

GIG SHEET — Thursday (28th): Chris McLure Section, Red Dragon, Greenock. Friday: Chris McLure Section, Clouds, Glasgow; Pendulum, Kilmarnock Grand Hall; Bubbles, Kinema Ballroom, Dunfermline.

Saturday: Nickelson, Bell-shill YMCA; Salvation, Cumnock Town Hall; Family Sam, J.M. Ballroom, Dundee; Chris McLure Section, Aviemore.

Sunday: Bubbles, Clouds, Edinburgh; Chris McLure Section, Avie Mire.

Monday: Bay City Rollers, Cumnock Town Hall; Chris McLure Section, Clouds, Edinburgh; Bubbles and Crisp, Hawick Town Hall.

Tuesday: Chris McLure Section, Maniqui's, Falkirk.

ANDY ROSS

Ireland

A LOT OF Irish bands caught onto Christmas this year and got records out in time for the festive market.

Thin Lizzy scored heavily with "Whiskey In The Jar" — a single which may be No. 1 in the Irish charts by the time you read this — and followed it up with a major tour that ends shortly after their National Stadium concert on January 10.

Dickie Rock arrived with "Lollipops, Lace and Lipstick" to commemorate his last days with the Miami, while Polydor snuck in with Vol. 30 of Pop History — a double album of vintage Gallagher.

The Plattermen presented their first heavy album, "Old Devil Wine", and Horslips more than lived up to the promise of a year's heady giggling with an astounding debut on wax — "Happy To Meet, Sorry To Part".

Ballad singers like Dermot Hegarty, Frankie McBride and Johnny McEvoy all had singles or albums ready, but the Daddy of them all — Big Tom — released his Christmas album months ago.

THE GIRLS were featured, too. Dick announced her return to the Irish showbiz scene with a single called "Stand By Your Man", while Kelley of the Nevada smashed into the Top Ten with "How Great Thou Art". Tracy of the Grassroots released her umpteenth single this year — "Paper Roses".

Perhaps the slickest Christmas single of the year was a

release by a non-performer. Club owner Charlie Murphy made his recording debut with a cover of the U.S. hit "Good Time Charlie's Got The Blues". And the name of his club? "Good time Charlie's" — what else?

SINGER Tony Kenny, who split from the Sands earlier this year, revealed his plans this week for a new solo career. Studio work in London has produced a number called "Heart Of Stone" which will be released on Mickie Most's rak label.

The number was co-written by Bill Martin and Phil Coulter, with Phil also working on production.

But despite Tony Kenny's avowed intention to strike out as a solo star, late reports had him fronting yet another showband. Meanwhile the Sands continue without him, and have a girl singer — Tara — on stage in his place.

FOLLOWING in the footsteps of Horslips and Planxty is yet another 'ethnic rock' outfit. This one's called Mushroom, and it hopes to have a January single on sale. The number is "Beggar Man".

Planxty, incidentally, also have quite an impressive record out just now. It's called "Cliffs Of Doneen", and is on the Polydor label.

COLIN McCLELLAND



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